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ABSTRACT

A school is a complex organism with many parts. It is necessary to understand the interrelations of these parts to improve schools. In working to improve education for at-risk students, school context must be considered as a factor. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory studied the factors that influence school leaders successfully to implement changes to help students, particularly at-risk students. This cultural approach to school improvement suggests that teachers and students are strongly influenced by the culture of the school, its norms, and conventions. The first section of this report is an introduction. The importance of context in school improvement is the topic of the second section. The third section on the ecology of the school includes these topics: resources; physical arrangements; demographic shifts; working conditions; and local, state, and federal policies. The fourth section on school culture includes information on attitudes and beliefs, attitudes toward change, cultural norms, cultural norms that facilitate school improvement, and relationships. The fifth section on leadership and context covers ecology and culture. Implications for leaders of school improvement and questions for further research are the topics of the final two sections. (Contains 109 references.) (JPT)

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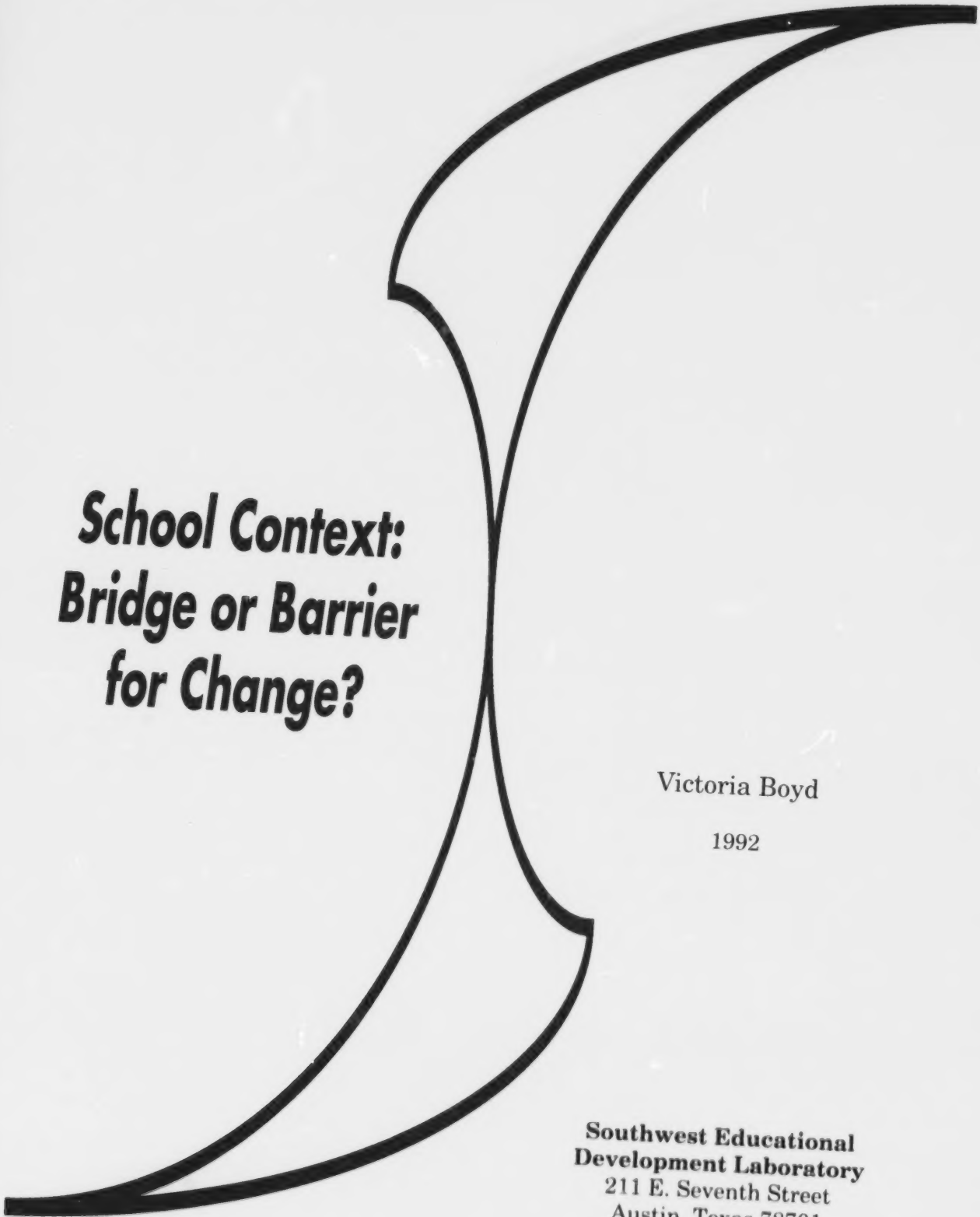

School Context: Bridge or Barrier for Change?

Victoria Boyd

1992

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School Context: Bridge or Barrier for Change?

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Introduction

This paper examines the literature regarding the contextual factors that might support or block efforts to improve schools and their effectiveness for all students. Its purpose is to provide practitioners with useful information for implementing lasting change. Of particular interest are those factors of the school context that support changes aimed at improving schooling for at-risk students. The number of at-risk students continues to increase, presenting an increasing challenge to educators. Contextual factors such as attitudes toward at-risk students are particularly important for change efforts because attitudes influence actions. In addition, because at-risk students seem to be especially sensitive to the school context, contextual factors may influence changes aimed at improving schooling for at-risk students more than change in general.

A school is a complex organism. It is not just a building with people inside.

A school is a complex organism. It is not just a building with people inside. To change schools it is necessary to consider the effects of change on all the parts of the organism. Each part is dependent upon the other parts and all parts react to changes in any other part. In addition, as Sarason (1990) notes, a school is part of a larger "system," and there are boundaries of varying strength and permeability,

although fuzzy ones at best, between these parts. "[T]rying to change any part of the system requires knowledge and understanding of how parts are interrelated" (Sarason, 1990, p. 15).

The school is the unit of analysis for this synthesis because as Krueger and Parish (1982) note, research supports the idea that change efforts need to focus at the school level. The need for leadership in change efforts is well documented at the school level.

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This paper is one of a series of three interrelated syntheses developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, all of them focused on factors that influence how school leaders successfully implement changes intended to benefit students, especially students at risk. The need for successful leadership strategies to implement change is discussed by Hord (1992) in one of these papers. The experiences and background characteristics of leaders that may facilitate or impede change are examined by Méndez-Morse (1992) in the third paper of this series.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine the context in which leaders find themselves as they engage in school improvement efforts. This method of examining change finds its roots in the cultural approach to school improvement, which suggests that "teachers and students are strongly influenced by the culture of the school, the mores, routines, and conventions about how things are done in their schools" (Deal & Peterson, 1990, p. 6). Attempts to improve the school using

this approach take into account contextual aspects of schooling to assure lasting change. Operational definitions for these and other terms are described below.

Definitions

Certain terms that are used repeatedly in this paper bear defining at the beginning. Because of the many definitions offered for the term climate, that term is not used in this paper, though the reader may identify parts of the paper that seem to address "climate." The term "context" or "contextual factors" is a broad term that gets at the idea of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all facets of the school.

At-risk students. Who are students at risk? Factors such as family background, personal characteristics, school context and school attitude or performance variables have been used to define at-risk status (Barnes, 1989). Richardson, Casanova, Placier, and Guilfoyle's study (1989) of at-risk students proposes that at-risk status is derived from an interaction between the characteristics of the child and the nature of the classroom and school. Family background, personal characteristics of the child, the school context and the social behavior of children interact to create conditions that place children at risk of failing to achieve their academic potential, dropping out of school, and/or having limits placed on their ability to function as productive adults in society.

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Traditional research, according to Wehlage and Rutter (1986), has tended to identify characteristics of at-risk students least amenable to change. The focus of new research, they say, might better be directed toward understanding the institutional character of schools and how this affects the potential dropout.

Context. Not only does this institutional character affect the potential dropout, it also has an impact on school improvement. Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone (1984) point out that "researchers are beginning to turn their attention...to understanding the conditions under which change projects succeed or fail" (p. 1). These conditions, which form the context of school improvement, are of particular importance to successful change.

Not only does this institutional character affect the potential dropout, it also has an impact on school improvement.

Several definitions of context may be found in the literature. Taguiri (1968, cited by Smey-Richman, 1991) defines the school context in terms of four dimensions:

- ecology (physical and material aspects)
- milieu (social dimension created by the characteristics of groups of persons)
- culture (social dimension created by belief systems, values, cognitive structures, and meaning)
- social system (social dimension created by the relationships of persons and groups) (p. 2)

The weaving together and interdependence of all the facets of the school create its environment or context. The context of the school is defined by the original Latin term *contextere*, "to weave together" (Cole & Griffin, 1987). *Webster's Third New*

International Dictionary (1966, p. 492) defines context as "the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs." Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone (1984) define context as a set of "local conditions," which include the availability of resources, relationships between persons and groups, use of educational knowledge, norms, in terms of goals and availability of incentives and disincentives, and rate of turnover. These are some of the circumstances surrounding change efforts that may impact that effort.

For the purposes of this paper, context will be viewed as consisting of two dimensions. As shown in Figure 1, the first dimension, the ecology, includes the inorganic elements of the school: those things that, while not living, have an impact on persons in the school. The resources available, policies and rules, and size of the school are examples of this dimension of school context.

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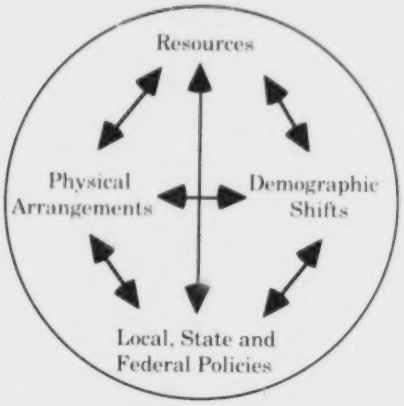
Figure 1



ECOLOGY

The second dimension of the school context is the culture. Culture is an expression that tries to capture the informal side of social organizations such as schools. Schein (1985) delineates several meanings of culture that appear in the literature:

Culture is an expression that tries to capture the informal side of social organizations such as schools.

- *Observed behavioral regularities* when people interact, such as the language used and the rituals around deference and demeanor.
- The *norms* that evolve in working groups, such as the particular norm of "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay" that evolved in the Bank Wiring Room in the Hawthorne studies.
- The *dominant values espoused* by an organization, such as "product quality" or "price leadership."
- The *philosophy* that guides an organization's policy toward employees and/or customers.
- The *[informal] rules* of the game for getting along in the organization, "the ropes" that a newcomer must learn in order to become an accepted member.
- The *feeling* ...that is conveyed in an organization by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with customers or other outsiders. (p. 6)

Schein (1985) goes on to define culture as "the deeper level of *basic assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment" (p. 6).

Similarly, school culture is defined by Smey-Richman (1991) to mean "the common set of values, beliefs, and practices that act as a social control mechanism directing

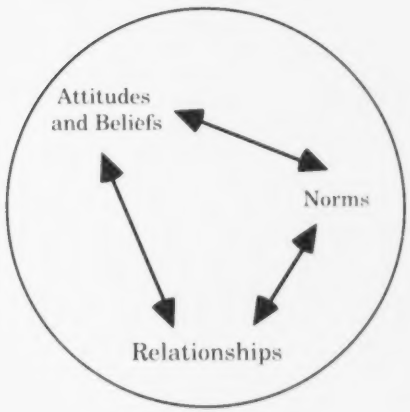
behavior through institutionalized norms (i.e. informal rules) generally subscribed to by organization participants... By influencing behavior, culture affects productivity or how well teachers teach and how much students learn" (p. 4).

For the purposes of this paper, school culture is conceptualized to include the three elements shown in Figure 2: the *attitudes and beliefs* held by persons both inside and outside the school, particularly attitudes about schooling, change, students, and other persons; the *cultural norms* of the school, composed of the set of informal, unwritten rules governing behavior in the school and community; and the *relationships* of persons inside the school, on both an individual and group level. The ways in which teachers relate to other teachers, students and teachers interact, and the relationships between teachers and administrators are examples of this element.

School culture is conceptualized to include attitudes and beliefs, cultural norms, and relationships.

This definition of culture is supported by the research of Hargreaves (1992) in his study of school and teacher cultures. He found that relationships are indeed part of the culture of the school. The personal characteristics and experiences of school leaders also may be thought of as part of the school culture. However, this is the subject of one of the two companion papers to this synthesis paper (Méndez-Morse, 1992) and the reader is referred to that paper to examine the effects of leaders' characteristics on school improvement.

Figure 2



It should be kept in mind that the interrelatedness and interaction of these elements of culture, along with the ecology of the school, create the context in which school improvement efforts are undertaken.

It should be kept in mind that the *interrelatedness and interaction* of these elements of culture, along with the ecology of the school, create the context in which school improvement efforts are undertaken. The physical setting created by the school building and school organization interacts with the beliefs, attitudes and values of people. Attitudes and beliefs held by individuals influence the norms and relationships in the school, and, conversely, cultural norms influence attitudes and beliefs. Relationships between persons in the school are influenced by and exert influence on other elements of the school culture. Although this paper looks at these interrelated parts separately for purposes of analysis, it is recognized that these elements do not, in reality, exist as such disparate pieces. It is precisely because of the interrelationships and interrelatedness of elements of the school that context is a factor in change (Sarason, 1990).

The Importance of Context in School Improvement

The call to improve the quality of education in the United States has been resounding for many years. Educators, researchers, policymakers, parents, community members and students have heard this call and responded in various ways. However, much remains to be done. The outcomes of schooling need to be improved, especially for at-risk students.

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According to Goldenberg & Gallimore (1991), a serious question which must now be faced is how to institute lasting change in the school.

> Despite considerable growth in knowledge about factors related to student achievement and the notable successes of numerous effective programs, very little is known about how scientific research actually finds its way into schools and classrooms, particularly those in which the contexts are substantially different from the contexts of the original research, for example Euro-American compared with language-minority populations. The "effective" schools literature, as influential as it has been, is of little help. There is typically no documentation of how a school got to be "effective," that is, how it instituted changes or used research findings in ways that ultimately affected children's learning (p. 3).

Louis and Miles (1990) cite the issue of leading and managing the process of change as a missing piece in school improvement, other than the exhortation to the principal to exercise "instructional leadership," in their study of urban high school change. The reader is referred to Hord (1992) for an examination of the literature regarding strategies for leading change.

Regardless of the new program or changes a school wishes to initiate, those leading school improvement efforts need an understanding of the complex nature of the school prior to and during the change effort in order to sustain implementation. In order to understand the impact of contextual factors on change, it is necessary to examine the circumstances of schooling and the meaning given to these by those in the school as well as those in the outside environment, parents and community members. The context in which those seeking to improve schools find themselves creates a set of conditions that may present bridges or barriers to change. By encouraging the development of those factors that facilitate change or nurturing them if they already exist, leaders increase the opportunity for change to become a permanent part of the school environment. Those factors that present barriers to change, if unrecognized, will thwart the efforts of the leaders of school improvement.

By encouraging the development of those factors that facilitate change or nurturing them if they already exist, leaders increase the opportunity for change to become a permanent part of the school environment.

The extent to which classroom changes are implemented and how long the changes last are "acutely susceptible" to the influence of contextual conditions in the school, according to a study conducted by Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone (1984).

"The basic argument is that existing school contextual conditions inevitably mingle with the change process to yield substantially different results from school to school" (p. xiii). In this paper, the context of schools will be viewed as a dynamic interplay of the ecology or inorganic elements of the school and the culture, which is composed of the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside and outside the school, the cultural norms of the school, and relationships between individuals and groups of persons. Specific elements of these dimensions that may act as facilitators or impediments to change will be examined.

The Ecology of the School

Elements of the ecology, i.e., the physical, material, inorganic aspects of schools, impact school improvement efforts. The availability of resources for change is one of these elements that has a powerful impact. Physical arrangements for organizing persons, scheduling patterns in the school, the size of the school, and the degree of safety in the school also can facilitate or impede interactions that are meaningful for school improvement. Other factors, such as the demographic patterns of the school and working conditions exert influence on change as well. Finally, the policies and rules that govern the school are an influential inorganic element.

Those seeking lasting school improvement must face the fact that effective change takes time and resources.

Resources

Those seeking lasting school improvement must face the fact that effective change takes time and resources. Limited funds may mean that certain types of improvements are never considered. The availability of school resources influences implementation strategies. According to Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone (1984), when time for planning and implementation activities or money to purchase materials is scarce, change activities will not make much progress. Funding is also important because underfunding a project may result in the inability to address problems until the next fiscal year (Pink, 1990). If resources are not available for the school

improvement effort, leaders must realize that in order to acquire resources, other groups or persons may have to be persuaded, converted to supporters, or even bypassed (Miles & Louis, 1990).

Many change efforts fail simply because not enough was invested in them in terms of time (Deal, 1985; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Sarason, 1982). It has been noted often that districts are vulnerable to faddism in their desire for quick-fix solutions to mounting problems (Carlson, 1987; Everson, Scollay, Gavert, & Garcia, 1986; Johnston, Bickel, & Wallace, 1990; Melvin, 1991; Pink, 1990; Simpson, 1990). Allowing the time needed for new programs to demonstrate results is often overlooked as a bridge to school improvement. Slavin (1989) points out:

Allowing the time needed for new programs to demonstrate results is often overlooked as a bridge to school improvement.

> If education is ever to stop the swinging of the pendulum and make significant progress in increasing student achievement, it must first change the ground rules under which innovations are selected, implemented, evaluated, and institutionalized...One of the most important reasons for the continuing existence of the educational pendulum is that educators rarely wait for or demand hard evidence before adopting new practices on a wide scale (p. 752).

Because it takes time to weld people into a team, this task requires great patience. "A particular mind-set for managing change: one that emphasizes process over specific content, recognizes organizational change as a unit-by-unit learning process rather than a series of programs, and acknowledges the payoffs that result from persistence over a long period of time

as opposed to quick fixes" is what is needed (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990, p. 166). Three factors that impact the amount of time necessary for change are urgency or a crisis situation, the attractiveness of the proposed change to individuals, and the strength of the culture that exists (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

Physical arrangements

In addition to the limits placed on school improvement by the availability of time and money, the physical structures of schools may also facilitate or impede change. In their study of urban school change, Louis and Miles (1990) cite constraints of the physical plant as a major source of implementation problems. Physical arrangements can contribute to the isolation of teachers both physically and emotionally. As Lortie (1975, cited in Fullan, 1991) found in his study of 6000 teachers, the cellular organization of schools keeps teachers physically apart from other professionals in the school. This isolation then impacts teacher attitudes and limits the relationships between teachers, students, administrators, and the community — relationships that are essential factors in the change process.

Physical arrangements can contribute to the isolation of teachers both physically and emotionally.

Because they are restricted to the classroom and tend to have a limited network of ongoing professionally-based interaction within their schools or with their professional peers, most teachers have limited contact with new ideas (Fullan, 1991). On the other hand, a study conducted by Smith and Keith (1971) shows how, even in a physical environment that is conducive to interaction, an "aggregate of people who

are interdependent yet isolated" may exist (p. 247). The staff of the school that they studied had a philosophy of freedom and of high communication levels, yet "people [did not] talk about significant events" (Smith & Keith, 1971, p. 247). This seems to indicate that the physical environment may contribute to isolation, but does not entirely explain it.

Structures in the school that contribute to teacher isolation and the feeling that the individual cannot make a difference are indeed barriers to school improvement efforts. Modifications in the physical arrangement of schools in order to facilitate professional interaction between teachers will reduce this isolation.

Structures in the school that contribute to teacher isolation and the feeling that the individual cannot make a difference are indeed barriers to school improvement efforts.

Physical arrangements also can contribute to student feelings of isolation and alienation. These feelings of isolation and alienation by students contribute to dropping out of school. Lawton, Leithwood, Batcher, Donaldson, and Stewart (1988) observe that "research on school related factors...has focused largeiy on student behaviours in school on the implicit assumption that it is the student who must change to fit the school...[E]fforts to reduce the number of dropouts ought to assume that it is the school rather than or in addition to the student which needs to change" (p. 27).

Secondary students, in particular, must cope with a structure with which no worker in the real world would be saddled (Shanker, 1989). Shanker (1989) describes some of these conditions:

> They're put into a room to work with 30 or more of their peers, with whom they cannot

> communicate. The teacher gives them their tasks, and, when the bell rings 40 or so minutes later, they have to gather up their belongings and head to another "work station" for a whole new set of tasks with a new "supervisor" who has a different personality and, very likely, a different method of operation. This routine is repeated six or seven times a day...All youngsters are expected to have sufficient motivation and self-discipline to get down to serious work on day one in anticipation of a "reward" far down the road—something most adults need all their fortitude to accomplish. (p. 3)

Fullan (1991) points out that students' active involvement in the school improvement effort is an essential ingredient in successful implementation. Student attitudes are affected when the structure of the school contributes to their isolation and alienation.

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Scheduling patterns

Cuban (1989) notes that the graded school is one of the most inflexible structures of schooling. After reviewing the history of schooling in the United States, he describes the graded school as a source of academic failure among at-risk students and calls for the redesign of this school structure. Due to the acute pressure to educate all children efficiently and inexpensively, Cuban (1989) argues, the structure of schools is not even on the agenda for change. This is an example of how historical precedence in the school may limit school improvement efforts.

Spady (1988) believes that the organization of schools around the calendar, the clock and the schedule, exerts a pervasive influence on the thinking of those who work and study in them. This focus on time, along with the legal mandate to keep students in the custody of the school for fixed periods of time, may result in teachers adopting the unproductive syndromes of "putting in time" and "covering material" (Spady, 1988). Examination of the organizational patterns of schools by those leading school improvement efforts is an important component of the change process.

School size

Several researchers have found that the size of the school is a physical characteristic that may either support or block school improvement, especially those efforts designed to improve schooling for at-risk students.

Several researchers have found that the size of the school is a physical characteristic that may either support or block school improvement, especially those efforts designed to improve schooling for at-risk students. Fowler and Walberg (1991) found that increased school size has negative effects upon student participation, satisfaction, and attendance and adversely affects the school climate and a student's ability to identify with the school and its activities. In a 1987 study, Pittman and Haughwout estimate that the dropout rate at a school increases one percent for every 400-student increase in the high school population. Bryk and Thum (1989) found that the effects of school size on absenteeism and dropout were "substantial, "but mostly indirect, acting to either facilitate (in small schools) or inhibit (in larger schools) the development and maintenance of a social environment conducive to student and faculty engagement with the school" (p. 26).

Monk's (1986) study of curriculum offerings concluded that benefits to the curriculum gained by size of enrollment peaked at 400 students. His conclusion is that high school enrollments be maintained at around 400 students. Below that number, "additional students translated into the school's ability to offer larger classes, improved students' access to courses and more specialized teacher assignments. Above 400, increases in enrollment made little difference in terms of these indicators" (Monk, 1986, p. 24).

Several researchers have found that small size tends to promote a sense of community in the school (Barker & Gump, 1964; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987). In a 1973 study of the Montgomery County, Maryland, schools, "smaller schools had more innovative teachers, staffs that had a voice in running the schools, a family atmosphere, close community relationships, and a principal who could make the best use of the staff" (Hobbs, 1989, p. 6).

Several researchers have found that small size tends to promote a sense of community in the school.

In a study of 14 schools that have been successful in their efforts aimed at at-risk students, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) found that certain structural characteristics were common in 12 of the schools. A small school size, defined in the study as less than 500 students, was one of these characteristics. Small size "promotes collegiality, makes democratic governance easier and fosters the consensus-building that sustains commitment to school goals....In general, the larger the school the more difficult it is to sustain sensitive one-on-one relations between educators and students, students and students, and educators themselves" (Wehlage,

Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989, p. 144). In large schools a breakdown occurs in communication, feedback about performance, and staff involvement in decision making (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1990). All of these qualities are important to facilitating lasting school improvement, as noted later in this paper.

Demographic changes can pressure schools to adopt and implement new policies.

Gottfredson (1985) examined the effects of school size on school disorder. In her study of large schools compared to small alternative schools for at-risk students, she found that large schools tend to be characterized by a lack of communication between teachers and administration and confusion regarding school policies. This can lead to school disorder because "teachers lose confidence in the administration and feel ineffective" (p. 41). Schein (1985) suggests that large size can lead to disruptive behavior. "Few circumstances cause as much breakdown of normal behavior patterns as excessive crowding, rendering any private space a physical impossibility" (p. 59).

Demographic shifts

Demographic changes can pressure schools to adopt and implement new policies (Fullan, 1991). Fullan explains that environmental changes external to the school impinge on it, increasing readiness to implement innovations. Demographic changes such as population shifts and redistricting decisions influence change efforts.

Another demographic variable, employment growth, has been found to be significantly and positively related to the proportion of college graduates in the population and to the high school dropout rate in a study of rural schools (Hobbs, 1991). The greater the employment growth in rural areas the higher the school dropout rate. According to Hobbs (1991), this finding is logical due to great increases in demand for employees in consumer services, e.g. retail, food, and travel services, in rapid growth areas. Students may find these types of jobs readily available for them if they drop out of school. This type of demographic change influences school improvement efforts for at-risk students.

To improve teacher performance, the work environment must enhance teachers' sense of professionalism and decrease their career dissatisfaction.

Working conditions

According to Fullan (1991), the working conditions of teachers in the vast majority of schools are not conducive to sustained teacher innovation. To improve teacher performance, the work environment must enhance teachers' sense of professionalism and decrease their career dissatisfaction. Conley, Bacharach, and Bauer (1989) found that in elementary schools where teachers perceive class size as manageable, the level of dissatisfaction is lower than in schools where teachers perceive class size as less manageable. A lower level of career dissatisfaction also was reported in elementary schools where teachers perceive an absence of student learning problems. Further, when elementary teachers reported an absence of student behavior problems, they also reported a lower level of career dissatisfaction. Consistent with findings from elementary schools, in secondary

schools, the perceived presence of student learning problems and student behavior problems emerged as predictors of teacher career dissatisfaction.

Sarason (1982) reports that the untested assumption that few others think the same way keeps school staff from expressing ideas for improving the school. Arrangements that increase isolation and frustrate change efforts include: the fact that "existing [structures] for discussion and planning within the school (faculty meetings; teacher-principal contacts, teacher-supervisor contacts, etc.) are based on the principle of avoidance of controversy; at all levels (teacher, principal, administrator) there is the feeling of individual impotence; [and, finally], there is acceptance of the untested assumption that the public will oppose any meaningful or drastic change in existing regularities" (Sarason, 1982, p. 102).

Sarason (1982) reports that the untested assumption that few others think the same way keeps school staff from expressing ideas for improving the school.

Local, state, and federal policies

When the ideas held about how schools should operate are written down, regulations, rules, and policies are produced. Because schools are public agencies, they must adhere to local, state, and federal regulations that make it difficult for schools to set their own educational goals. According to Clune's (1991) historical review of educational policy, these policies have not been effective or coordinated (i.e., pointed in the same direction) in improving achievement. Clune (1991) points out that the United States has produced more educational policy than any other country, but it has been the least effective.

This vast array of regulations runs counter to the findings of Chubb and Moe (1990), who found that schools with a greater percentage of academically achieving students have "substantial school autonomy from direct external control" (p. 183). Likewise, Wehlage et al. (1989) found in their study of schools successful with at-risk students that "without exception, educators cited autonomy as significant in their ability to construct programs that respond to students" (p. 144).

"Desired connections between policies and practices are difficult to find. Policies are seldom carried out to the letter" (Deal, 1985, p. 603). This may be true due to the loosely coupled nature of schools, a concept discussed in the culture section of this paper. Fine (1991) describes how some policies, such as allocation formulas and required procedures for student discharge, actually exacerbated the dropout problem in particular schools.

Past attempts to reform schools have generally sought to use policy mandates to drive changes from top to bottom in schools.

Past attempts to reform schools have generally sought to use policy mandates to drive changes from top to bottom in schools. "This strategy either has not worked or, at best, has gone as far as it can in creating authentic and sustained change in our schools. Some of the most essential elements necessary to restructure a school – commitment, engagement, or sense of invention cannot be mandated" (Lieberman & Miller, 1990, p. 759). According to Cuban (1988), a lack of understanding regarding "first-order" changes, which are defined as attempts to make what already exists more efficient and effective without altering basic organizational

features, and "second-order" reforms, which seek to change fundamental organizational structures, has resulted in ineffective solutions.

It seems more is known about factors that contribute to educational outcomes than is reflected by educational reform policies. Hobbs (1988) notes that the work of Kerr (1984) devoted itself to the problem of why schools are not doing better considering what is known. Kerr's analysis focused on bureaucracy, professionalization, and "research systems" as barriers to the alignment of knowledge and policy.

It seems more is known about factors that contribute to educational outcomes than is reflected by educational reform policies.

Levine (1991) argues that "substantial change in instruction frequently requires departures from district or state policies and regulations" (p. 391). In a review of the literature on school and community influences, Shields (1990) notes that states can limit local efforts with restrictive regulations or promote local efforts through such strategies as increased funds, technical assistance and cooperative efforts between school districts and state departments. District and state policies that foster building autonomy, build alliances with the community, and encourage the sharing of information, skills and understanding can improve and maintain effective classroom instruction (Shields, 1990).

The existence of state test scores may lead state officials to assume more responsibility for the schools, to feel obliged to act to solve problems and, if necessary, to make curricular policy directly, according to Corcoran (1985). The use of state tests appears to be associated with increased administrative control

over both the process and the content of instruction (Corcoran, 1985; Shields, 1990).

Basic education policy should be shaped at state and district levels, but the day-to-day decision-making should shift to the local school, according to a report of the Carnegie Foundation (1988). This report concludes that what is needed is school-based authority with accountability at the school level.

Implications

The inorganic aspects of the school are important due to their impact on the development of attitudes and beliefs, the facilitation of relationships, and the establishment of a widely shared culture. Elements of the ecology can facilitate or impede efforts to improve schools' capacity to implement changes that support at-risk students.

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The lack of resources is a major barrier to sustained change efforts. These resources include not only money, but also time. Patience with implementation efforts and student outcomes translates to a willingness to allow the time necessary for change.

When the organizational pattern of the school creates a focus on custody and control rather than instruction and improvement, it too impedes change. Crowded, disorderly schools feed this mission of control and create an environment that decreases teacher career satisfaction and limits

innovation. Modifications to the school organization to reduce levels of isolation and alienation move the school closer to a context supportive of lasting school change.

Rules, regulations, and policies at the national, state and district level may constrain or enhance successful implementation efforts. Knowledge about the types of policies that will increase student achievement and address the second-order level of change is needed. These policies, however, need to allow autonomy for day-to-day decisions at the local site .

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The School Culture

The term culture has been defined in various ways by many authors as discussed earlier in this paper. Here the culture of the school will be viewed as the existence of an interplay between three factors: the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside the school and in the external environment, the cultural norms of the school, and the relationships between persons in the school. Each of these factors may present barriers to change or a bridge to long-lasting implementation of school improvement. It bears repeating, however, that the *interrelatedness* of these facets of the school most strongly affects the efforts of those seeking to improve schools. As Fullan (1991) notes, factors affecting implementation "form a system of variables that interact to determine success or failure" (p. 67).

It bears repeating, however, that the interrelatedness of these facets of the school most strongly affects the efforts of those seeking to improve schools.

The Impact of Culture

An examination of school culture is important because, as Goodlad's study (1984) points out, "alike as schools may be in many ways, each school has an ambience (or culture) of its own and, further, its ambience may suggest to the careful observer useful approaches to making it a better school" (p. 81). Krueger and Parish (1982), in their study of five districts implementing and then discontinuing programs, postulate that the key to program implementation and continuation is "the interactive relationships that teachers

have worked out together regarding 'how we gets things done here' " (p. 133). Depending upon how well leaders understand and use this notion, culture can assist school improvement efforts for at-risk students, or act as a barrier to change (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Krueger & Parish, 1982; Sarason, 1982; Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986).

The culture of the school reflects the local culture in many ways (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988; Welch, 1989). When schools seek to improve, a focus on the values, beliefs, and norms of both the school and the environment outside the school is necessary (Sarason, 1982; Deal and Peterson, 1990).

When schools seek to improve, a focus on the values, beliefs, and norms of both the school and the environment outside the school is necessary.

Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986) summarize the general knowledge base regarding school culture:

- School culture does affect the behavior and achievement of elementary and secondary school students (though the effect of classroom and student variables remains greater).
- School culture does not fall from the sky; it is created and thus can be manipulated by people within the school.
- School cultures are unique; whatever their commonalities, no two schools will be exactly alike—nor should they be.
- To the extent that it provides a focus and clear purpose for the school, culture becomes the cohesion that bonds the school together as it goes about its mission.
- Though we concentrate on its beneficial nature, culture can be counterproductive and an obstacle to educational success; culture can also be oppressive and discriminatory for various subgroups within the school.
- Lasting fundamental change (e.g. changes in teaching practices or the decision making structure) requires understanding and, often, altering the

school's culture; cultural change is a slow process. (p. 98)

Attitudes and Beliefs

The effect of school culture on school improvement efforts is significant. The attitudes and beliefs of persons in the school shape that culture. Many times innovations are not put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit persons to familiar ways of thinking and acting (Senge, 1990; Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991). This failure is played out in schools on a regular basis. The attitudes and beliefs of those in the school create mental models of what schooling is and how others in the school should and will respond to events and actions. It is from these attitudes and beliefs that the culture of the school is created.

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Attitudes and beliefs about schooling. As noted earlier in this paper, a school is complex in and of itself, as well as being part of a larger system. Frequently the individual's conception of the system serves as a basis for maintaining the status quo and opposing change, according to Sarason (1982). Anticipating trouble in relation to the system is characteristic of many school staff. A perception of the system as intolerant is cited by Sarason (1982) as one of the most frequent and strongest barriers to trying what are conceived as innovative procedures. If untested, this assumption becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Goldman & O'Shea (1990) in their analysis of their school note that a system paranoia exists that says

"they won't let me do it," or "I knew things hadn't changed," or "there they go again" (p. 43). This paranoia creates barriers to change.

Fine (1991) asserts that educators generate belief systems because they need to explain their efforts in ways that give them a sense of accomplishment. These belief systems may help educators feel more successful, but may also prevent them from imagining what could be. According to Fine (1991), some of these beliefs are:

These belief systems may help educators feel more successful, but may also prevent them from imagining what could be..

- Things can't change.
- Discipline is the overwhelming obstacle to school success.
- Work with the survivors.
- Educational bureaucracy obstructs progressive public education.
- I do the best job I can in my classroom. (p. 156)

Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986) delineate five prevailing assumptions about the world in which educators work. The first is that "school systems are guided by a single set of uniform goals"; a second is that "power in school systems is (and should be) located at the top" (p. 7). These assumptions, the researchers believe, contribute to behaviors among school staff that prevent power sharing. Third, "decision making in school systems is seen as a logical problem-solving process that arrives at the one best solution" (p. 8); alternatives or modifications of this "one best solution" may not be sought. An extension of this idea is that "there is one best way to teach for maximum educational effectiveness" (p.8). Finally, the belief that "the public is supportive of school systems and influences them in predictable and marginal

ways" (p. 8) ignores the impact that parents and the community have on schools.

Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986) suggest some alternative assumptions that could facilitate school improvement by helping to restore a sense of efficacy to educators:

- School systems are guided by multiple and sometimes competing sets of goals.
- Power in school systems is distributed throughout the organization.
- Decision making in school systems is a bargaining process in order to arrive at solutions that satisfy a number of constituencies.
- The public is influential in major and sometimes unpredictable ways.
- A variety of situationally appropriate ways to teach is allowed and desired so that teachers may be optimally effective. (p. 7-8)

Attitudes regarding at-risk students. Cultural influences impact behaviors of students and may contribute to failure in schools for minority students. According to Gault and Murphy (1987), many American schools claim to practice cultural pluralism, but in reality all students are expected to fit into the white middle class culture. Students with different cultural backgrounds, values, and skills than those generally valued by American schools may be perceived as incapable of performing according to the school's standards.

When students have different cultural backgrounds, values, and skills than those generally valued by American schools, teachers and administrators tend to perceive the students as incapable of performing according to the school's standards.

In addition to the assumptions described above, some commonly accepted myths about minority children become barriers to their access to quality education. The 1990 report of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology project, *Education*

That Works: An Action Plan for the Education of Minorities, identified many of these myths, including the following:

- Learning is due to innate abilities, and minorities are simply less capable of educational excellence than Whites. (p. 37)
- The situation is hopeless; The problems minority youth face...are so overwhelming that society is incapable of providing effective responses. (p. 37)
- Quality education for all is a luxury, since not all jobs presently require creativity and problem solving skills. (p. 38)
- Education is an expense and not an investment. (p. 38)
- Equity and excellence in education are in conflict. (p.38)
- All we need are marginal changes. (p. 39)
- Minorities don't care about education. (p. 39)
- The problem will go away. (p. 40)
- Educational success or failure is within the complete control of each individual, and in America anybody can make it. (p. 40)

... beliefs slant teachers' choices of classroom activities, and their evaluation of student performance toward goals.

Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) found that teachers' assumptions about students and their families reinforced their views about child development and academic learning in general. Teachers tend to blame the family for the child's at-risk condition rather than the child or the school (Richardson, Casanova, Placier, & Guilfoyle, 1989). These beliefs slant teachers' choices of classroom activities, and their evaluation of student performance toward goals. The teachers' perceptions of the child and of the child's family are strongly affected by the teachers' beliefs and expectations about academic performance and classroom behavior, the characteristics of the rest of the students in the classroom, and the school setting (Richardson et al., 1989).

Student attitudes toward schooling. Just as the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and values of teachers impact change efforts, student beliefs and attitudes influence school improvement. Students must believe that they are respected as persons and that they are tied to the school. However, as noted earlier, two attitudes prevalent among high school students are boredom and alienation (Wehlage, 1988).

Two attitudes prevalent among high school students are boredom and alienation

One sign of alienation is a reluctance to engage in academic competition. Houston (1991) suggests that minority students in non-urban schools may be reluctant to engage in academic competition because:

- They don't believe that their individual efforts to achieve will be rewarded by the dominant culture.
- They believe that they are intellectually inferior to their white peers.
- They resent and distrust the dominant culture and reject some of its values.
- They believe that the values of their culture are in conflict with those of the dominant culture. (p. 64)

In a study of 1064 secondary school students in an urban school district, Calabrese and Poe (1990) found that "African American and Latino [American] students must confront schooling conditions that may cause higher levels of alienation....Their recognition of discrimination in an environment that professes to offer equal opportunity creates a sense of estrangement and alienation" (p. 25). Students must recognize a high level of caring, respect and expectations for their success, as well as a capacity for influencing what goes on in school in order to increase their commitment to the school and change efforts (Firestone &

Rosenblum, 1988). These cultural aspects of school are discussed in later sections of this synthesis.

Like any child who is significantly different from the majority of classmates, gifted children too are apt to experience feelings of social discomfort and sometimes isolation or alienation. In such a situation the child seeks peer acceptance by masking giftedness, conforming to peer behavior patterns, and purposely underachieving (Whitmore, 1988).

External values affect the culture of the school, shaping what goes on inside.

Attitudes among people in the external environment. External values affect the culture of the school, shaping what goes on inside. Deal (1985) suggests a number of changes in the external environment that have eroded the support of local communities:

- The belief in attending school as a prime pathway to virtue and success in later life, is no longer widely or firmly shared.
- The intuition and insights of local educators have been replaced by an emphasis on research, giving more authority to researchers' and consultants' expertise than tradition and experience.
- More use of evaluation, management by objectives, and a focus on technical aspects of instruction and administration have occurred.
- Professional teacher associations have become highly vocal and cultivated ties with or emulated the practices of labor and trade unions.
- Events such as desegregation, court enforced student rights, and new approaches for particular groups of students have changed the traditions, moral order, and historical practices of local schools. (p. 613)

Attitudes Toward Change

Teacher attitudes toward change. Waugh and Punch (1987) reviewed the literature on change and identified variables related to teacher receptivity to change: basic attitudes toward education (discussed in the previous section), resolution "of fears and uncertainties associated with change, personal cost appraisal for change, practicality of the [change], ...perceived expectations and beliefs about the change in operation," and perceived school support (discussed later in this paper) (p. 237).

Several researchers emphasize that a teacher's attitude toward change is dependent upon how change affects them personally.

Several researchers emphasize that a teacher's attitude toward change is dependent upon how change affects them personally. Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall (1987) assert that it is critical to understand the point of view of those involved in the change effort. "A central and major premise of the [Concerns Based Adoption Model] is that the single most important factor in any change process is the people who will be most affected by the change" (Hord et al., 1987, p. 29). From their studies of change, Hord et al. identify seven developmental stages of concern related to the introduction of innovations in schools. These stages provide insights into teachers' attitudes that contribute to their willingness to engage in the school improvement effort. The "self" stage of concern occurs during the early stages of the change effort, when teachers are primarily interested in the personal effects the change will have. Individuals progress (assuming that concerns at each level are addressed) through concerns about completing the task, concerns about the innovations' impact

on students, and, finally, concerns about finding "even better ways to reach and teach students" (p. 32).

Welch (1989) reports that teachers assess advantages and disadvantages of collaborative consultation primarily in terms of how implementation will impact them personally, rather than how it might impact student growth. He states that "for innovative change in school settings to be meaningful, its effectiveness must be proven in terms of the personal and professional growth of all involved, not just student growth" (p. 538).

Feedback, especially about the positive results of one's efforts, is a large factor in teachers' commitment to change.

Practical changes are those that address salient needs, that fit well with the teachers' situation, that are focused, and that include concrete how-to-do-it possibilities (Fullan, 1991). Feedback, especially about the positive results of one's efforts, is a large factor in teachers' commitment to change. Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone (1984), found that incentives (defined as any source of gratification or deprivation) play a critical role in the change process. Those involved in school improvement efforts must believe that the needs being addressed are important and that they are meeting those needs (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Having some success, in a tangible way, is a critical incentive during implementation (Fullan, 1991).

Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest that change should be thought of as skill-building and training as part of the change process. They believe that even if people understand and accept a change, a major impediment to successful change is lack of the skills and ability to carry out the new plan. "In

school improvement efforts, leaders must take the time to help people in schools, particularly teachers, genuinely understand the importance of adopting a new program, attending in-service training, and implementing a particular program" (Krueger & Parish, 1982, p. 136). "[Teachers] need to know whether there is sufficient knowledge available to make smaller changes that fall short of a complete redesign...[and] what, [if any], common markers characterize those schools, programs and classrooms that are successfully serving at-risk students" (Cuban, 1989, p. 799). How to determine who is using the new program and in what form the program is being used is explored in the work of Hord et al. (1987).

Misdirected change may result in confusion for students.

Student attitudes toward change. Fullan (1991) proposes four images that represent the range of student attitudes toward change. These attitudes are indifference, confusion, temporary escape from boredom, and heightened interest and engagement with learning and school. "Indifference is closely tied to the claim that the more things change in education, the more they remain the same...For [many students] the main benefit of the school is the opportunity it provides to interact with close friends on a daily basis" (p. 181). Misdirected change may result in confusion for students. If programs and policies are unclear to teachers and administrators, it is not unreasonable to assume that they will result in "confusion on the part of students" (Fullan, 1991, p. 183).

Fullan (1991) reports that pupils' interpretations of their traditional roles in the classroom can impede change. Any innovation that requires students to do something new will succeed or fail based on students' actual participation. Students will participate, according to Fullan, if they understand, have the necessary skills, and are motivated to try what is expected. The temporary escape pattern of response occurs when students view innovations as only a change of pace in the routine and boredom of schooling. Finally, a student response of heightened interest and engagement is "central to any school improvement effort" (Fullan, 1991, p. 183).

Various constituencies want various things, all for less money.

Community attitudes toward change. "Schools are generally responsive to constituent groups. This means that people outside schools will have influence on the type of new programs that may be introduced" (Krueger & Parish, 1982, p. 134). Change efforts fail if the community does not provide ongoing encouragement, support and resources (Gauthier, 1983). Schools are vulnerable to pressures for change from external groups because they must try to satisfy what their constituents believe is proper for schools (Cuban, 1990).

Various constituencies want various things, all for less money. Many citizens, because they have no children in the schools, apparently feel they need not be concerned about the quality of education (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986). Schools, however, "have great difficulty in becoming self-renewing without support from their states and local districts

and especially from their surrounding constituencies" (Goodlad, 1984, p. 31).

According to Fullan (1991), communities can take one or a combination of three actions in response to school change: put pressure on district administrators to change, oppose specific innovations, or do nothing. Gold and Miles (1981, cited in Fullan, 1991) give an example of what happens when a community was not involved in the adoption of "open education." With teachers unable to explain why they were adopting this innovation, concern increased and parents put an end to the innovation.

School boards play a role in change efforts, yet are often overlooked.

School boards play a role in change efforts, yet are often overlooked, according to Fullan (1991). School boards can indirectly affect implementation by hiring or firing reform-oriented superintendents. In their investigation of the role of school boards in successful districts in ten districts in British Columbia, LaRocque & Coleman (1989, cited in Fullan, 1991) found that in situations where the school board and the district are actively working together, substantial improvements can be achieved, compared to boards that remain uninvolved or have many conflicts.

Additional Factors That Influence Attitudes Toward Change

Burnout. Burnout, defined by Sarason (1982) as adaptation to overload, stress, and the perception that conditions are not likely to change, can cause several negative

factors that impact school improvement efforts. These include:

> loss of concern for the client and a tendency to treat clients in a detached, mechanical fashion; increasing discouragement, pessimism, and fatalism about one's work; decline in motivation, effort, and involvement in work; apathy; negativism; frequent irritability and anger with clients and colleagues; preoccupation with one's own comfort and welfare on the job; a tendency to rationalize failure by blaming the clients or 'the system'; resistance to change; growing rigidity; and loss of creativity. (Sarason, 1982, p. 203)

These attitudes will impact change efforts and at-risk students who tend to be more sensitive to the context of the school.

The legacy of prior change projects, by its influence on teacher attitudes, values, and perceptions, may act as either a barrier to or a facilitator of change.

The legacy of prior change. The legacy of prior change projects, by its influence on teacher attitudes, values, and perceptions, may act as either a barrier to or a facilitator of change. Cynicism and apathy may reflect negative experiences and produce teachers who are unwilling to proceed regardless of the content or quality of the program (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984; Fullan, 1991). Even more disturbing, according to Deal (1990), is the impact of constant change on the culture of schools and the attitudes of educators.

Cuban (1988) states that most reforms fail because of flawed implementation. Teachers and administrators see minimal gains and much loss in changes that are proposed by those unfamiliar with the classroom as a work place. "Magic

bullet" type programs, isolated from the rest of the school and intended to spread change throughout the school at once, tend to be irrelevant, at best (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990). "At their worst, they actually inhibit change. By promoting skepticism and cynicism, [these types] of programmatic change can inoculate [schools] against the real thing" (p. 72).

Implications

The difficulty associated with facilitating change in people's values, attitudes, and behavior is "grossly underplayed and often ignored" (Waugh & Punch, 1987, p. 244). The result is the likelihood that innovations will not be well received by teachers due to conflict with the firmly entrenched traditions (Waugh & Punch, 1987). Purkey and Smith (1983) propose that change in schools means changing attitudes, norms, beliefs, and values associated with the school culture. In order to change attitudes it is important to identify beliefs and feelings. "If the belief system of individuals within a culture is altered, the likelihood of behavioral change is enhanced" (Welch, 1989, p. 538).

The difficulty associated with facilitating change in people's values, attitudes, and behavior is "grossly underplayed and often ignored".

The internally held mental models of school and the beliefs of teachers regarding schooling, students, and change impact the behavior of teachers toward students, especially those at risk, as well as toward school improvement. This is particularly important because, as defined at the beginning of this paper, it is the interplay between the characteristics of the student and the context of school that defines a student as

at risk. Identifying and confronting beliefs that prohibit students from achieving their potential are vital components of school improvement efforts.

Resolving fears and anxiety created by change is a major task for those leading school improvement. Taking time to ensure that the reasons for the change, the practicality of this program for the specific problem being addressed, and the philosophical basis for the effort are well understood by everyone involved will enhance the likelihood of lasting implementation.

Just as the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside and outside the school building may facilitate or impede change, the norms, or informal rules that govern behavior exert influence on change efforts.

Cultural Norms

Just as the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside and outside the school building may facilitate or impede change, the norms, or informal rules that govern behavior exert influence on change efforts. These norms are developed over time and are influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of those inside and outside the school. In turn, the norms define expectations regarding how things are to be done. This exerts an influence on beliefs and attitudes and the relationships of persons.

Internalization of the culture. Because of the impact of cultural norms on school improvement, the extent to which individual staff members internalize that culture affects improvement efforts as well. Schein (1985) explains that "every organization is concerned about the degree to which people at all levels 'fit' into it" (p. 42). Those new to the organization must learn the culture or suffer consequences,

such as the feeling of alienation. If, on the other hand, the employee is "oversocialized", "the result is total conformity, leading to the inability on the part of the organization to be innovative" (Schein, 1985, p. 42).

Schein (1985) delineates the elements that affect the degree to which culture is internalized.

- *Common language and conceptual categories.* If members cannot communicate with and understand each other, a group is impossible by definition.
- *Group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion.* One of the most important areas of culture is the shared consensus on who is in and who is out and by what criteria one determines membership.
- *Power and status.* Every organization must work out its pecking order, its criteria and rules for how one gets, maintains, and loses power; consensus in this area is crucial to help members manage feelings of aggression.
- *Intimacy, friendship, and love.* Every organization must work out its rules of the game for peer relationships, for relationships between the sexes, and for the manner in which openness and intimacy are to be handled in the context of managing the organization's tasks.
- *Rewards and punishments.* Every group must know what its heroic and sinful behaviors are; what gets rewarded with property, status, and power; and what gets punished in the form of withdrawal of the rewards and, ultimately, excommunication.
- *Ideology and "religion."* Every organization [must reach consensus on how to manage the unmanageable and explain the unexplainable. Stories and myths about what was done in the past provide explanations and norms for managing situations that defy scientific decision making.] (p. 66)

Every organization must work out its pecking order, its criteria and rules for how one gets, maintains, and loses power.

Pollack, Chrispeels, and Watson (1987), in their study of ten schools engaged in school improvement efforts, emphasize that internalization of change is important because it "leads to transformations and changes in users' practices and the consequent institutionalizing of change at a school site" (p. 15). Most teachers rely on the memories of their own teachers' actions, teacher-training programs, and the process of socialization to cope with problems (Davis, 1988). They become, according to Davis, reasonably comfortable with the standard operating procedures of the school's culture. When change occurs, such as the introduction of a new program, discomfort occurs. A "time honored practice in many schools" is to simply forget to implement new programs in order to insulate against the "anxiety-producing situation" that change presents and that those involved wish to avoid if at all possible (Davis, 1988, p. 6).

Most teachers rely on the memories of their own teachers' actions, teacher-training programs, and the process of socialization to cope with problems.

Student culture. Like other cultures, the school culture consists of a dominant culture and subcultures of various groups. The student culture is one of these subcultures.

> Attention must be paid to the peer culture of students, especially in secondary schools...The extent to which the student culture values academic success or willingly complies with school rules, will affect their achievement. Since student peer culture influences student performance, school staff members must [know] whether the dominant peer culture adds to or detracts from the school's mission (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986, p. 101).

Staff members need to examine the dominant student culture and look for ways to help students internalize elements of the school culture that will make students supportive of the school's mission (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986). Wehlage (1983), in his study of successful programs for at-risk students, notes the existence of a peer culture that supports the rules and goals of the program. The programs he studied were perceived by students as having a family atmosphere that provided acceptance and constructive criticism. Students believed that the rules and goals were in their interest.

Turnover. One barrier to internalization of the school culture is turnover among staff. The instability of teachers in urban schools presents a problem for program continuity (Conklin & Olson, 1988; Pink, 1990). Similarly, the departure of a respected teacher who strongly advocates a project may dampen enthusiasm for it among the remaining teachers (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). Whether due to the loss of teachers who serve as leaders of the project, the loss of those who are trained in project implementation, or the loss of teachers who serve as a support mechanism, turnover gets in the way of lasting improvement.

One barrier to internalization of the school culture is turnover among staff.

Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone (1984), in their study of fourteen schools implementing change, note that "the consequences of turnover on change projects can be considerable, especially if a principal who supports a project leaves and is replaced by another whose priorities are different" (p. 7). This may be more true for "high-powered,

charismatic principals who 'radically transform' the school in four or five years," according to Fullan (1992), because "so much depends on his or her personal strength and presence" (p. 19). Fullan admits that no follow-up studies have been done on schools with this type of principal, but suggests that most of these schools decline after the leader leaves. "Too much store is placed in the leader as solution compared to the leader as *enabler* of solutions" (p. 19).

Cultural Norms that Facilitate School Improvement

Norms such as introspection, collegiality, and a shared sense of purpose or vision combine to create a culture that supports innovation.

Researchers have found particular cultural norms that can facilitate school improvement. Norms such as introspection, collegiality, and a shared sense of purpose or vision combine to create a culture that supports innovation (Staessens, 1991). In her study of nine primary schools in Belgium, Staessens found that a school culture with these norms was instrumental in the school's ability to sustain school improvement. Saphier and King (1985) list from their experience twelve norms of school culture that support significant, continuous, and widespread improvements in instruction. These include norms that encourage: high expectations; experimentation; use of the knowledge bases; involvement in decision making; protection of what's important; collegiality; trust and confidence; tangible support; appreciation and recognition; caring, celebration, and humor; traditions; and honest, open communication. The degree to which these norms are strong makes a difference in the ability of school improvement activities to have a lasting,

or even any, effect. Other writers confirm the need for cultural norms that support change efforts.

Norms of continuous critical inquiry. Saphier and King (1985) note that good schools have a wide-spread belief that any school has areas of strength and weakness. This belief creates an openness to dealing with imperfections, suggesting that the school has high expectations for itself and its ability to improve. Barth (1991) believes, based on his experience, that the most important change to bring to schools is a cultural norm of continuous adaptability, experimentation, and invention. If everyone in the culture is reluctant to express ideas they perceive are counter to group norms, a barrier to change is created (Sarason, 1982).

If everyone in the culture is reluctant to express ideas they perceive are counter to group norms, a barrier to change is created.

Druian and Butler (1987) reviewed the literature on effective schools and practices that work for at-risk students. They found that successful programs do not suppress criticism but instead provide a positive and constructive atmosphere in which criticism can occur. A barrier to a norm of continuous improvement is the silencing of criticism by schools, which contributes to resistance to change and the dropout problem, according to Fine (1991). A "hidden curriculum" identified by Howe (1987) in his experiences as a researcher was found to underlie the structure of the school and to emphasize conformity.

Norms of continuous improvement. Similar to the introspective attitude associated with a norm of critical inquiry, a norm of continuous improvement suggests that

when problems surface, information, resources and training will be provided to address the problems. Use of the knowledge base supposes an expectation for staff development to occur as a cultural norm that facilitates change. Cardelle-Elawar (1990) studied mathematics teachers who had shown deficiency in mathematical skills and pedagogy. Her study points out that a school can make significant gains, in spite of faculty weaknesses, through sound staff development. Schools, however, commonly fail to have a norm regarding the need for in-service work during implementation (Fullan, 1991).

... a school can make significant gains, in spite of faculty weaknesses, through sound staff development.

Patterson, Purkey and Parker (1986) note that "numerous research studies (e.g. Berman & McLaughlin, 1978 and Fullan & Pomfret, 1977) converge on the theme that access to information, resources, and support by those ultimately responsible for using a specific innovation is critical to successful implementation" (p. 30). Information must be clear regarding the school improvement effort. "Unclear and unspecified changes can cause great anxiety and frustration to those sincerely trying to implement them" (Fullan, 1991, p. 70). A limited knowledge base and lack of technical support from specialists are cited by Wiggins (1991) as two factors that contribute to teachers' reluctance to adopt new programs. This is significant, since Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) found in their study of teacher commitment that learning opportunities for teachers was one predictor of teacher commitment, an important element of sustained change efforts.

Change requires a real understanding on the part of teachers and other people in schools about how to implement the change (Clune, 1991). Pink (1990) found that an inadequate theory about school change, a lack of awareness of the limitations of teachers and administrators, and a lack of technical assistance for program conceptualization, implementation and evaluation were barriers to effective implementation of programs.

A widely shared vision. A norm of protecting what is important evolves from a shared vision of what things are important. Numerous researchers have found that sharing a common vision increases the likelihood that school improvement efforts will succeed (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Deal, 1985; Carlson, 1987; Miles & Louis, 1990; Norris & Reigeluth, 1991; Schlechty & Cole, 1991). A shared vision among students, faculty, parents, and the external community is a feature of schools in which all students are most likely to succeed academically. If this shared sense of purpose exists, members of the school community are able to spell out what constitutes good performance in a relatively precise and consistent way. Without a shared vision, students, teachers, administrators, and parents do not know what is expected of them (Smey-Richman, 1991). A shared vision helps point out what is important to develop and protect in the school.

A shared vision among students, faculty, parents, and the external community is a feature of schools in which all students are most likely to succeed academically.

A shared vision is one to which many people are truly committed, because it reflects their own personal vision. A vision that is not consistent with values by which people live

continuously will fail to inspire and often will foster cynicism (Senge, 1990). Miles (1987, cited in Fullan, 1991) stresses that vision involves two dimensions: "The first is what the school could look like; [this vision] provides the direction and driving power for change, and the criteria for steering and choosing...The second [dimension] is a vision of the change process: What will be the general game plan or strategy for getting there?" (p. 82). Both dimensions of the vision are both sharable and shared.

The closer the change objectives are to a district's vision, the better the chance that changes will be continued.

In addition, Berman and McLaughlin (1975) found, in their often cited study of school change efforts, that when the goals of a change project are close to district priorities, the likelihood that change will result is higher. The closer the change objectives are to a district's vision, the better the chance that changes will be continued. When change objectives fall below a district's top three or four priorities, problems arise, according to Corbett, Dawson, and Firestone's (1984) study of school context and change.

A norm of involvement in making decisions. Many researchers have found that participation in decision making by those affected directly or indirectly by the school improvement effort is essential to successful implementation and institutionalization (Everson, Scollay, Fabert, & Garcia, 1986; Pollack, Chrispeels, & Watson, 1987; Raelin, 1989; Sarason, 1982; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). A cultural norm supporting the involvement of teachers in decisions or plans that will affect them heightens the possibility that changes will be appropriate in a particular

setting. Involvement makes it more likely that responsibility will be assumed and not be attributed to others (Sarason, 1982).

By providing the opportunity for participants to discuss and plan changes, leaders help to assure a higher quality innovation along with greater commitment to and ownership of the innovation. Teachers want their students to be successful, in part, because they want their own ideas and efforts to be successful (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Participation in decision making helps people acquire the knowledge and skills needed to change their behavior and contribute to successful implementation (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984).

By providing the opportunity for participants to discuss and plan changes, leaders help to assure a higher quality innovation along with greater commitment to and ownership of the innovation.

On the other hand, educators who are denied serious involvement in policy settings and decision making cannot be fully effective with students (Giroux, 1988 cited in Fine, 1991). Giroux's data suggests that educators who feel that they can influence institutional policy and practice also feel that "these adolescents" can be helped. Educators who feel that they can not influence either policy or practice consider their students to be "beyond help" (Fine, 1991).

Implications

The informal rules that govern behavior in schools appear to play a significant role in the institutionalization of school improvement efforts. Those norms that facilitate change must be widely internalized in order to encourage movement toward

the goal of changing the school. Not only teachers, but students as well need to internalize the norms of the school improvement culture.

Norms that encourage introspection and critical inquiry about the strengths and weaknesses of the school are needed. These norms encourage criticism in order to highlight areas that need improvement. When criticism is silenced, change efforts are hindered. An expectation that information, resources and training will be provided to address problem areas creates the norm of continuous improvement needed for lasting change. A clear vision of the school when the change is successfully implemented and how implementation will occur needs to be developed among all those in the school. This shared vision provides support for the change effort and relieves anxieties. Participation in decision making by all those involved is another aspect of the school improvement culture.

A clear vision of the school when the change is successfully implemented and how implementation will occur needs to be developed among all those in the school.

Change is a threat to a culture. The introduction of planned change challenges the status quo and forces staff members to compare their current cultural content with the innovation (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988; Sarason, 1982). Cultural change is also anxiety producing because the assumptions that stabilize the world must be given up (Schein, 1985). When the existing norms of the school are those that encourage introspection, improvement, and involvement, change is encouraged. Encouraging the development of these norms is an important aspect of leadership for change.

Relationships

Just as the attitudes and beliefs of persons both inside and outside the school affect change and the norms of the school, relationships between persons and groups of persons are part of the school culture that can either facilitate or impede change. The relationships teachers have with each other, their students, and the community affect change. In like manner, the relationships between students and their peers, teachers, and the school as a whole can help or hinder school improvement efforts. This section examines these relationships. Relationships between the principal and others is examined later in this paper.

Collaboration raises morale, enthusiasm, and the teachers' sense of efficacy and makes teachers more receptive to new ideas.

Teacher relationships with teachers. The ways in which the physical surroundings in schools contribute to isolation of teachers was discussed earlier in this paper. Developing collaborative work cultures helps reduce the professional isolation of teachers, allows the sharing of successful practices and provides support. Collaboration raises morale, enthusiasm, and the teachers' sense of efficacy and makes teachers more receptive to new ideas (Fullan, 1991; Simpson, 1990; Smith & Scott, 1990).

Collegiality, which according to Barth (1990), is frequently confused with congeniality, is difficult to establish in schools. Little (1981) describes collegiality as a norm exhibited through four specific behaviors: Adults in schools who have a collegial relationship talk about practice. They also observe each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration.

Colleagues engage together in work on curriculum by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating it. Finally, collegiality is exhibited when adults teach each other what they know about teaching, learning, and leading.

Barth (1990) suggests that a number of outcomes may be associated with collegiality:

> Decisions tend to be better. Implementation of decisions is better. There is a higher level of morale and trust among adults. Adult learning in energized and more likely to be sustained. There is even some evidence that motivation of students and their achievement rises, and evidence that when adults share and cooperate, students tend to do the same....The relationships among adults in schools allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement. Unless adults talk with one another, observe one another, and help one another, very little will change. (p. 31)

Collegial relationships facilitate change because change involves learning to do something new.

Collegial relationships facilitate change because change involves learning to do something new. Learning new behaviors, skills, and beliefs "depends significantly on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals or are exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work" (Fullan, 1991, p. 77). Deal and Kennedy (1982) reinforce the idea that those interested in change must be aware that peer group consensus will be the major influence on acceptance or willingness to change. People will change more readily as a result of a desire to have personal ties with others.

As the antithesis of collegiality, faculty factions undermine efforts to successfully implement change by sidetracking, stalling, or stopping the change process (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). The need for collegiality bears consideration by those who would initiate change. Schlechty and Cole (1991) note that the ways in which changes are introduced may breed rivalry among teachers. Thus an important leadership responsibility of leaders who work within the cultural perspective is supporting collegial interactions between teachers (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986).

Student relationships with teachers. The body of literature addressing students as players in school improvement is noticeably thin. As Fullan (1991) points out, students are typically seen only as the potential beneficiaries of change rather than as participants in the process of change. This traditional view of students is reflected in the observations of Fine (1991). The principal of the high school in Fine's study seemed to believe that merely telling students what to do, without their involvement, would compel their compliance. Due to their findings regarding the close relationship between teachers and student attitudes, Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) agree that the role of high school students in school improvement activities needs to be evaluated. Students are rarely informed regarding plans in spite of the fact that the plans cannot be carried out successfully when students are not committed to cooperate with the plan, and do not know what to do or how to do it (Fullan, 1991).

Students are typically seen only as the potential beneficiaries of change rather than as participants in the process of change.

Fullan (1991) explains how students can exercise negative power to reject what is being imposed. High school students often negotiate a "live and let live" relationship with teachers that "allows some students to be left alone as long as they do not disrupt classroom life" (p. 180). This presents a barrier to change by protecting the status quo. Change is required on the part of students for effective change in schools to occur (Fullan, 1991).

Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) found in their study of ten urban high schools that teacher and student commitment are mutually reinforcing. When teachers demonstrate respect, high expectations, and support for students, students respond to them in positive ways. In the same way, teachers' commitment is influenced by the response they get from students.

When teachers demonstrate respect, high expectations, and support for students, students respond to them in positive ways.

Wilson and Corcoran (1988, cited in Fullan, 1991), in a study of 571 effective secondary schools, showed how school context creates "conditions of teaching" that influence "learning environments" for students (p. 176). "Teacher expectations influence student behavior, and expectations vary for different types of students" (Fullan, 1991, p. 177). Some teachers blame students for difficult classroom situations. These beliefs are reflected in actions such as displaying an "attitude" to students, abrupt responses to students, and less detailed explanations (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). Students' commitment to the school is reduced, Firestone and Rosenblum found, when they recognize that they are not respected. According to Fullan

(1991), "at-risk students are more likely to find themselves in such situations" (p. 175). Bryk and Thum (1989) found, in their study of the High School and Beyond data base, that absenteeism is less prevalent in schools where teachers are interested in, and interact with, students and where there is an emphasis on academics "within an environment that is safe and orderly" (p. 377).

Student peer relationships. At-risk youth share with all students the need for group membership, the need for positive relationships with adults, the need to acquire skills and knowledge, and the need to develop a sense of competence (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). "Minority students in non-urban schools may develop their self-esteem and perceive their [ability to control situations] in ways that work against their acceptance of school values and participation in important school activities" (Houston, 1991, p. 65). These students feel confident in their ability to achieve goals established by peers who share the same culture. According to Houston (1991), this is contrasted with a perception among minority students that the school's values have little worth and the students have little ability to control or have an impact on positive outcomes in school.

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Development of a feeling of belonging to a group is actively sought by all students (Purkey & Smith,1983; Cuban, 1989). According to Deal (1985), a well documented result of peer relationships is the effect of subcultural membership on educational outcomes. Student leaders, or heroes, significantly affect the scholastic tone of a school — and

subsequently, student behavior and performance (Deal, 1985). Taylor (1989) found that gang subcultures that engage in drug trafficking for enormous profits cause education to have limited appeal to many students.

School, teacher and student — A community of caring. Teachers and students need to believe they are being treated with decency and fairness by those at other levels (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Firestone & Wilson, 1991). When many of their personal and professional needs are satisfactorily met through their work environment, teachers are able to transmit to students a sense of interest and caring for their academic endeavors and their personal lives. In schools with a strong community sense, teachers feel less isolated, have more social support, and are more likely to find help from colleagues with work-related problems. Teachers can also establish and find value in attachment to students and communicate to them their belief in the importance of academic work (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

In schools with a strong community sense, teachers feel less isolated, have more social support, and are more likely to find help from colleagues with work-related problems.

A school context that forms a sense of community is necessary to promote the cognitive and emotional growth of students (Purkey & Asby, 1988; Smey-Richman, 1991). This context is noncompetitive and emphasizes a personal and caring relationship with teachers who are empathetic to students. Druian and Butler's (1987) study found that a family atmosphere in a school will reduce the likelihood that students reject the school. Successful school programs have in common "a model of community, an extended family where

achievement is important and so is caring for one another" (Wehlage, 1988, p. 31).

Care should be taken, however, to avoid the negative effects of what Miller, Leinhardt and Zigmond (1988) describe as accommodation. They define accommodation as a concern for student needs that is reflected in the administrative processes that govern the school. Allowing students to "buy back" unexcused absences by attending an afterschool program in order to pass a course or simplifying curriculum so that students will have less difficulty are cited as examples of accommodation. Negative side effects that may occur from accommodation are students' expectations that accommodations will always be made, a lack of active student engagement with the content of instruction and increased student boredom and apathy (Miller, Leinhardt, & Zigmond, 1988).

Parents need to be involved as co-teachers in their children's education.

Parent, community and school relationships. The lack of strong school/community partnerships inhibits high performance. Schools where parents and teachers are supportive of each other and have close relationships acquire a more community atmosphere (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Parents need to be involved as co-teachers in their children's education. To "isolate the school from the broader community overlooks this need for a sense of mutual purpose and partnership" (Conklin & Olson, 1988, p. 4).

Implications

Collegial relationships in the school facilitate change. These relationships assist in learning the new practices of the school improvement effort and reduce isolation. If teachers choose not to participate in collegial relationships, or decision making, school improvement initiatives will not enjoy sustained implementation. The creation and nurturance of a school culture that encourages and supports these types of cooperative relationships falls on those who lead the school improvement effort.

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The relationships between students and teachers and students and their peers can facilitate or impede change. When teachers are interested in students and demonstrate respect for them, a community of caring is nurtured. This community sense reduces isolation and alienation discussed in earlier sections as a factor that impedes change. When many students feel this sense of community, their need for positive relationships with adults and group membership may be satisfied in ways that mesh the student culture with the school culture in positive ways. A connection with the broader community outside the school is also needed to support the school improvement culture.

Leadership and Context

Because principals are seen as the primary leaders in the individual school, this section of this paper examines how the principal is both a part of the context while feeling the impact of the context. Because specific strategies used by principals or others leading school improvement efforts are addressed elsewhere (Hord, 1992), issues are raised in this section, as in preceding sections, that are intended to heighten awareness regarding the existence of factors that appear to facilitate or impede change. Without awareness of their existence, educators cannot possibly address the problems they present to change, or the help they may provide for change might be overlooked.

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Ecology

A study by Hallinger, Bickman and Davis (1990) of school administrators found that the impact of the context of the school on administrators is as profound as it is for students and teachers. "Factors such as school district size and complexity, the number and types of special programs, faculty experience and stability, school level, district support and expectations and other factors shape the principal's approach to instructional leadership" (p. 8). In addition, features of the community such as homogeneity, socioeconomic status of families, parental expectations and

involvement, and geographic location simultaneously constrain the principal and provide different opportunities for leadership (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1990). Principals who are aware of the inorganic factors of the school context and their influence on school improvement efforts may take steps to reduce or enhance the impact of those factors depending on the needs of their school.

Culture

Experiences as a teacher can cause principals to view going into the classroom for purposes of evaluation and change as a hostile intrusion.

Leaders seeking to improve schools for at-risk students will nurture the norms of school culture that support lasting school improvement. Fullan (1992) notes that developing collaborative work cultures to help staff deal with school improvement efforts is a major responsibility of the principal. He asserts that "the message for both the school and district levels is captured in Schein's (1985) observation: 'The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture'" (p. 20). An additional challenge for principals is that they are also part of the culture of the school through their attitudes and relationships with others.

Principal attitudes toward change. Sarason (1982) describes how past experiences can influence a principal's beliefs. Experiences as a teacher can cause principals to view going into the classroom for purposes of evaluation and change as a hostile intrusion. A belief that the power to legislate change is no guarantee that the change will occur also may be based in part on the principal's experience as a teacher. These experiences create "the tendency to deny that problems exist in the school" (Sarason, 1982, p. 147).

According to Berman and McLaughlin's 1975 study, the active support of principals powerfully affects a project's implementation and continuation. The principal's contribution to implementation lies in giving moral support to the staff and in creating a culture that gives the project "legitimacy" rather than in "how to do it" advice (Sarason, 1982, p. 77). Teachers need the sanction of their principal to the extent that the principal is the "gatekeeper of change" (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975, p. 20).

Principals' actions serve to legitimate whether a change is to be taken seriously and to support teachers both psychologically and with resources. The principal is the person most likely to be in a position to shape the organizational conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structures and climates, and procedures for monitoring results (Fullan, 1991). "Change efforts fail if principals do not understand and support them, if faculties do not view them as relevant to their own goals and needs and if the community and central office do not provide ongoing encouragement, support, and resources" (Gauthier, 1983, p. 9).

Most people believe a school principal has a good deal of power and freedom to act in the school.

Most people believe a school principal has a good deal of power and freedom to act in the school. They rarely realize that there are numerous restrictions, formal and informal, that limit the principal's freedom of action (Sarason, 1982). One principal faced with impending restructuring described the conflicting feelings the prospect evoked: "I feel like a bird that has been caged for a long time. The door is now open.

Will I dare to fly out? I am beginning to realize that the bars of the cage that have imprisoned me have also protected me from the hawks and falcons out there." (Barth, 1990, p. 128)

Principals have little formal preparation for managing change at the school level. The principal must face problems of change that are as great as those that confront teachers. Many principals feel that "other people simply do not seem to understand the problems they face" (Fullan, 1991, p. 76). Simpson (1990) asserts that leaders, just like teachers, need partners, someone to nurture them, and persons with whom to collaborate.

Principals have little formal preparation for managing change at the school level.

The attitude that "the system" will not allow certain practices is not questioned by many principals. This attitude presents a significant barrier to improvement efforts. Evidence that some principals within the same system change their practices and that these practices are tolerated by "the system," is an indication that as important as the system itself is, the way the principal perceives the system is even more significant (Sarason, 1982).

Principal relationships with teachers. As it goes between teacher and principal so will it go in other relationships in the school. If the teacher-principal relationship can be characterized as helpful, supportive, trusting, so too will relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Unfortunately, according to Barth (1990), the relationships between teachers and principals have become increasingly strained with growing emphasis on teacher

empowerment, pupil minimum competency, collective bargaining, reduction in teacher force, increased litigation, and above all "accountability." The administrative subculture must deal with issues of accountability, control, and change. Deal (1985) asserts that these values "frequently place principals in direct conflict with teachers" (p. 611). According to Goodlad (1984), however, "a bond of trust and mutual support between principal and teachers...appears to be basic to school improvement" (p. 9).

Change will be undermined if misconceptions held by teachers regarding administrators and by administrators regarding teachers are not dealt with. Liftig (1990) asserts that administrators perceptions of teachers as "the Loafer, the Artful Dodger, and Them" and teachers' perceptions of administrators as the "Snoopervisor, the Terminator, and the Successful Incompetent" cloud this essential relationship for school improvement.

Change will be undermined if misconceptions held by teachers regarding administrators and by administrators regarding teachers are not dealt with.

Louis and Miles (1990) note that broad participation in developing the change program is essential to implementation. Sarason (1990) argues that schools, like other social systems, can be described in terms of power relationships and that recognition of these relationships and the distribution of power is a significant issue in change. The basis for power rests with the acquisition of three commodities: information (technical knowledge, expertise), resources (money, human services, material goods, space, time), and support (endorsement, backing, legitimacy). Access to these commodities by those ultimately responsible

for using a specific innovation is critical to successful implementation (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986). Personnel who will encourage the flow of information between the formal and informal systems and, where needed, make sure that the flow occurs are needed. Teachers who are influential leaders are especially useful in assisting with implementation through informal networks within the school (Krueger & Parish, 1982).

In a study of five schools in Missouri that had adopted national improvement programs and then discontinued them within a short time, Krueger and Parish (1982) identified an "informal covenant" that exists between teachers and principals. This covenant defines the roles of each group and relationship between them where implementation of new programs is concerned. "Principals control access, resources, and decision making. Teachers control what is going to actually be implemented, if anything" (p. 138). This covenant was responsible for the demise of the new programs at these schools according to the study.

The degree to which the superintendent supports school improvement affects the ability of individual schools to increase student achievement.

Relationships with the district. The degree to which the superintendent supports school improvement affects the ability of individual schools to increase student achievement (Wimpelberg, Teddlie, & Stringfield, 1989). The superintendent and central office supervisors are key figures in stimulating and facilitating efforts to maintain and improve the quality of instruction (Everson, Scollay, Fabert, & Garcia, 1986; Firestone & Wilson, 1991; Patterson, Purkey & Parker, 1986; Pajak & Glickman, 1989; Pink, 1990). "Teachers and

others know enough now, if they didn't 20 years ago, not to take change seriously unless central administrators demonstrate through actions that they should" (Fullan, 1991, p. 74). Levine (1991) notes that the success of an effective schools program depends on a "directed autonomy" defined as a mixture of autonomy for participating faculties and control from the central office (p. 392).

Relationships with the external environment. Principals are accountable to parents, the central office, school boards, and the state department of education. The school principal is the agent through which others seek to prevail on teachers to do their bidding. "Principals are judged on the basis of how effectively they can muster teachers to the drumbeats of these others, by how well they monitor minimum competency measures, enforce compliance with districtwide curricula, account for the expenditure of funds, and implement the various policies of the school board" (Barth, 1990, p. 27). With these many forces exerting pressure on the principal, focus on the change effort may be difficult. Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1990) found, however, that parental involvement has a positive impact on principal leadership.

The school principal is the agent through which others seek to prevail on teachers to do their bidding.

The support of the community for the school and efforts to improve the school have been shown to be vital for lasting implementation. Because the school's culture is impacted heavily by the external environment, the introspection and critical examination of the school by those who are implementing school improvement efforts cannot occur without a supportive community. If schools are to be

successful in providing success for all students, especially those at risk, parents and other members of the community must be actively involved in the school and school improvement effort.

Community involvement often entails the allocation of resources to eliminate disadvantages in students' access to resources (Nettles, 1991). One significant contribution of business is support of adequate and equitable financing of the public schools and an insistence that the schools produce students who are properly prepared for the workforce and who are good citizens (Carnegie Foundation, 1989). It is essential that the community, including parents, social agencies, businesses, and civic and volunteer organizations, be involved particularly in rural areas where resources are simply too scarce to attempt to deal with problems in isolation (Helge, 1989).

Support groups are the key ingredients in reducing opposition to change.

Support groups are the key ingredients in reducing opposition to change. It is important, first, to identify target groups that are essential for effecting change. Some of the critical groups include "teachers, and teachers' organizations; school administrators and the groups that represent them; school boards; parents; civic, business, and political leaders, including governors and legislators; and taxpayers generally" (Schlechty & Cole, 1991, p. 79). There is little chance to survive the competition for limited resources without the appropriate constituency (Sarason, 1982).

Implications

Caught between the external demands of constituent groups and the needs of teachers and students, as well as the community and institutional contexts, administrators at both the district and building level have a difficult role to fulfill. Their attitudes, beliefs, and values, like those of teachers and students, profoundly impact efforts to improve schools.

Administrators must often take risks regarding what the system will allow. It is they who provide support, both psychologically and through the allocation of resources, to give credence to implementation efforts. Without this support, these efforts will not succeed. Administrators demonstrate this support through power sharing and relationships with teachers. As previously stated in this paper, establishing and nurturing a culture of shared power and decision making, with norms of introspection for continuous improvement, is an important task for school administrators. It is a task that is shaped by the community and institutional context in which administrators find themselves.

Administrators must often take risks regarding what the system will allow.

Implications for Leaders of School Improvement

Leaders of school improvement efforts must understand that schools are complex organisms, with all parts interrelated and interdependent. The fact that the leader is also part of this organism creates difficulty. The leader both acts on and is acted upon by the context of the school. The context of the school plays a vital role in school improvement efforts and the success of at-risk students. Leaders must understand and learn how to work with elements of the school context if they want school improvement to succeed.

The leader both acts on and is acted upon by the context of the school.

Many elements of the school context impact the efforts of those seeking to improve schools. A small school size seems to facilitate change. Mega-schools may adopt school-within-a-school structures to facilitate development of the sense of community necessary to support these changes. Policies may be established that encourage the development of a context that supports school improvement. When teachers and administrators must depart from district or state policies and regulations to improve instruction, it is not difficult to understand why they are reluctant to change.

The culture of the school exerts a powerful and pervasive influence over everything in the school. It is important to

debunk long standing myths and beliefs regarding schools and schooling. Some of the most powerful of these are:

- Teachers' and administrators' view of each other as adversaries rather than colleagues.
- Teachers' and administrators' view of parents and community members as adversaries rather than partners.
- Internal beliefs regarding children's "innate" abilities.
- A feeling of hopelessness and the lack of a feeling of efficacy.
- The belief that the power structure that exists now (authoritarian and hierarchical) is the only way that schools can be structured.
- A belief that there is only one best way to teach all children.

The interaction of beliefs such as these and the school setting powerfully impact what teachers and administrators do, what they see (in terms of what the problems are and what solutions can be considered), and what they are willing to change.

The interaction of beliefs such as these and the school setting powerfully impact what teachers and administrators do, what they see (in terms of what the problems are and what solutions can be considered), and what they are willing to change. Before a leader can work to change beliefs in an individual school, the beliefs held by teachers, as well as the leader's own beliefs, need examination. If the internally held beliefs and perceptions that truly guide behavior do not change, neither will the school, at least not for long.

Because actions reflect deeply held and often unquestioned beliefs and myths, the culture of the school may need alteration. This task requires understanding the culture, being open to criticism, and confronting those beliefs that act as barriers to the success of at-risk students. Changes in "the way we do things around here" will be made. A knowledge of factors identified by Schein (1985) that affect internalization can be used to help staff internalize the new culture.

Cultural norms of continuous improvement, a shared sense of purpose that includes a vision of improved outcomes for at-risk students as a major goal, and collegial relationships provide support for school improvement efforts. Norms of continuous improvement and experimentation imply that teachers constantly seek and assess potentially better practices inside and outside their own schools. This culture of continuous introspection helps build a school community where collaboration, collegiality, and involvement by many groups in decision making may exist. This is vital to the development of a shared vision which is, in turn, vital to successful implementation. Not only should this shared vision include the outcomes desired by those involved, it also should include a shared vision about "how to get there", which includes the change process itself. A shared sense of purpose creates ownership of the program among all players. Schools must be open to the idea that criticism is necessary because it exposes areas of weakness. If these weaknesses are denied or ignored change cannot happen.

All participants in change are asked to rethink their beliefs, recognize unproductive patterns, and change them.

Change produces anxiety for everyone involved. All participants in change are asked to rethink their beliefs, recognize unproductive patterns, and change them. Persons confronting change seem primarily interested in three things when confronted with changing the informal rules they have worked out about how things are to be done. They are:

- How will this change affect me and what I do personally?
- Why do you have reason to believe this can be implemented?
- Once implemented, why do you think it will work?

Leaders can help resolve fears and provide support both emotionally and with necessary resources, including time. The resource of time is especially important considering that changing the culture of the school is extremely time consuming and costly. The staff needs to know what the new "thing" looks like when fully implemented, and what modifications they can make, if needed, without sacrificing the integrity of the new program.

Commitment and innovation cannot be mandated.

Teachers also need to believe that they are the essential ingredient in success for at-risk students and to act in ways that confirm this belief. Leaders can focus attention on the need for autonomy, independence, and a sense of efficacy on the part of teachers. Leaders need to investigate past attempts to change the school and explain why this innovation is different. They also must understand that teachers are resistant to change based in part on past experiences with change and their belief system or mental model of schools.

Commitment and innovation cannot be mandated. They come from the establishment of a school context that supports collegial relationships, shared decision making, autonomy with accountability, and involvement by all those involved in education. This environment exists both inside the school and in the external environment. This environment creates a starting point for lasting school improvement. According to Sergiovanni (1990), schools are "tightly coupled" around cultural themes. "Teachers and students are driven less by bureaucratic rules, management protocols, contingency trade-

offs and images of rational reality and more by norms, group mores, patterns of beliefs, values, the socialization process and socially-constructed reality...In a loosely connected world, it is culture...that is key to bringing about the coordination and sense of order needed for effectiveness" (p. 11).

Students are active participants in the change process. Student involvement in making decisions needs to take the form of more than just a few student leaders, especially when trying to improve the performance of at-risk students who are unlikely to be those elected to the student council. Leaders need an awareness of the following student attitudes toward change identified by Fullan (1991):

- Indifference — The change must be meaningful to students' reality.
- Confusion — Teachers and administrators must have a clear picture of the change so that students will too.
- Temporary escape from boredom — It must be demonstrated that the improvement effort is not just another passing novelty.
- Heightened interest and engagement with learning and the school — Students must be participants in the change effort.

Student involvement in making decisions needs to take the form of more than just a few student leaders, especially when trying to improve the performance of at-risk students who are unlikely to be those elected to the student council.

Promoting interest and engagement with learning and school on the part of students is essential because the change effort will struggle if students remain indifferent, confused, or only temporarily amused by the change. Involving students will help alleviate student boredom and alienation. Changing student-teacher relationships so that students perceive teachers as persons who care about them can help increase student engagement with the school. Once again, a

sense of community will be developed. This community must be one, however, that does not merely accommodate students by lowering expectations and providing ways for students to be supported to the extent that they believe they do not need to take responsibility for themselves. Leaders may also assess the student peer culture and look for ways to mesh it with the school culture to provide more support for the change effort.

Six categories were found to correlate with both school effectiveness and reduced dropout rates.

Lawton, Leithwood, Batcher, Donaldson, and Stewart, in their study of dropouts in Ontario high schools (1988), identified factors from research on exemplary secondary schools and then tested these factors as a causal model of school-related factors that influence the dropout problem. Six categories were found to correlate with both school effectiveness and reduced dropout rates:

- Shared goals — clarity and commitment to intellectual goals for students.
- Dedicated, collegial teachers who expect all students to be successful.
- A school organization and policies that encourage academic achievement, a degree of flexibility, and a lack of preoccupation with simply "running a smooth ship".
- A strong basic and academic curriculum with student grades based on a large sample of student work.
- A widely shared school culture that supports respect for individuals, provides safety, and places priority on academic work.
- A school-community relationship that is supportive due to a positive image of the school in the community.

The school context does shape what administrators are able

to do. However, the belief that "the system won't let us" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy all too often. Support by the principal is vital, to the extent that the principal has been called the gatekeeper of change. The relationship between teachers and the principal sets the standard for all other relationships in the school. Principals, in turn, need the support of the superintendent and central office.

The culture of the school reflects local community culture in many ways. Community support of the school itself and for the change effort is vital. Parents and community members can be active partners and allies, not adversaries. This will provide the resources needed and assist in changing the culture of the school.

The interrelatedness of the contextual factors presented in this paper may cause difficulty or provide support in creating schools where student outcomes are not dependent on gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, at-risk status, or other labels that are applied to students. In order to remove barriers and facilitate efforts to improve schools for all students, leaders can support and nurture conditions that create the cooperative and introspective context needed for lasting improvement for all students, especially those whose characteristics and background interact with the context of the school to create conditions of risk.

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Questions For Further Research

Throughout this paper, the context of schools has been presented as a set of factors. Though these factors were discussed individually, it has been noted that they are both interrelated and interdependent. It also has been asserted that it is precisely because of these interrelationships that context is important to school leaders seeking to improve schools for at-risk students. The literature supports the idea of these interrelationships. However, exactly how these factors affect each other is not clear in the research. One may hypothesize from personal experience in schools the results of these interactions. However, due to the site-specific nature of context, these generalizations may or may not hold true in another school setting. Further research is needed to clarify exactly how these elements are interrelated and, indeed, what effects the various factors alone have on any other factor. In addition, there may be other elements that contribute to the interrelationships among the elements of context.

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Discussed earlier in this paper, a norm of experimentation has been identified as supporting school improvement. Some have theorized that the technology available to schools today may encourage the development of this norm because it "requires [teachers] to give up long-held beliefs about teaching and learning and to devise instruction that embodies new goals and approaches" (Sheingold, 1991,

p. 19). Others (e.g. Collins, 1991; David, 1991) have suggested other influences of technology on change. The role of technology in facilitating or impeding school improvement efforts seems to provide an area for further research as well.

Further study is also needed regarding exactly what leaders may do to reduce the effects of barriers to change and strengthen those elements that seem to support change. What might leaders do, for example, in schools where a strong culture exists, yet that culture does not provide support for school improvement efforts for at-risk students? How might the context support changes for at-risk students that will be sustained even if the leader leaves the school?

What might leaders do, for example, in schools where a strong culture exists, yet that culture does not provide support for school improvement efforts for at-risk students?

Case studies of schools that have a history of change, as well as those beginning change efforts, are being conducted to examine these and other questions about how leaders successfully bring about change in schools that improve schooling for at-risk students. The context of these schools and specific factors that create bridges or barriers to change will be examined. It is expected that these studies will provide insight regarding the interrelationships between various elements of context.

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